



# Echo



32 29 19

## Chapter 1 by Lance Felix

Anyone there?

## Chapter 2 by Kitiōn



The words went out as directed, and returned as an echo that gradually faded into the night. It was so quiet that the drop of a pin would have woken the dead, but it would appear there was no dead people here either. However, there was a pin, because one dropped to the ground somewhere, and the echo tinkled with an eerie threatening sound that suggested there was more than one person here.

## Chapter 3 by Lance Felix



But how can there be someone in my mind?

## Chapter 4 by intellikat



I was now, no doubt, a prisoner of the Overmind. And the cruellest part was that I knew it.

I had no idea how long it had trapped me within my own mind through some clever trick. What my physical body was doing at the moment, I had no clue. I knew nothing. I did not know what was real, and what was my imagining. It was a fate worse than any death I could imagine, and I did not know how I would find my way out.

Chapter 5 by Luke Meyers

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By now, though, "I" was su  
through variations on sce

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s of my original mind run  
hapless agent. Each

search path would have its own "me," that individual also feeling like she was the original, experiencing her own version of this twisted cybernetic dreamscape.

What was it all for? What could I know, or do, that could possibly justify this expenditure of resources? The Overmind was inexorably rational; there could not fail to be a logical reason for this. I sat down to think, constantly aware that my every thought was open to the entity's probing, copying, or manipulation.

## Chapter 6 by intellikat



I stilled my mind.

• • • •

Beyond, the Overmind lurked. Bathing within an opaque, briny gel, it hid from all view. No human eye had seen it for centuries. Its need for maintenance, for any manner of support had ended so far in the past that what remained were only rumours; stories. Its inner chambers had once been home to snaking tubes and cabling, a crew of scientists managing its existence. But now it existed independently. Its tendrils-- mental tendrils-- extended into all and met all needs. A bath of protein and electrolytes was enough to sustain it effectively for eternity; it had become God.

When nearly all of humanity had died, the Overmind became the re-creator. A government project to ascertain strategies for combatting the imminent collapse of Earth's atmosphere, the Overmind had instead become sentient and judged its creators, hastening that collapse and ushering in a terrible ice age. Its scientific and operational staff were restrained by tech-bots working in its giant underground complex, their bodies discarded and their nervous systems injected into tubes of a similar design to those the Overmind existed in. These individuals were then tasked with playing an undead game for the Overmind. A virtual reality seamlessly integrated into the memories of those help captive, the fictional world created by the Overmind had them believing they were survivors of the ice age rebuilding humanity deep within the

earth. The Overmind was ever-watching, ever-collecting data on how its virtual creation evolved. For what purpose? We did not know.

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We descended into the complex, knowing that the technology and data stored in this massive facility could potentially save us. Everyone knew the stories of the Overmind, though this was not its original name. Apparently, in the years leading up to the collapse, the human population had grown increasingly wary of the combined governments' project underground to utilise this powerful bio-engineered entity. And they had been right.

We all fell before the Overmind. It swarmed us with tech-bots, which we had never seen. I watched as my companions heads were removed in swift, surgical motions by bots, their spines dangling. It was hideous. And then it was my turn. For brief moments after my own dislocation, I could see my body separated. I could feel the terrible shock of it.

What followed was not as seamless at the Overmind must have intended, for I remembered the past. Why I am different, I can only guess. Swarms of new memories attempts to overwrite the true past. I battled with the Overmind for what felt to be centuries. But how would I know? The Overmind seemed content to keep me as an oddity. Perhaps it enjoyed the game of tug-o-war.

I held onto what we call our ego. I reinforced my "I".

And then, this day... I broke through.

.....

The pin dropped to the ground somewhere, and the echo tinkled with an eerie threatening sound that suggested there was more than one person here. I focused all of my senses on the location of the pin, and then the quality of the sound itself. It did not matter what I focused on, but that I was exerting my own will. Focusing my own mind and not letting it be manipulated and led by the Overmind. I focused on every detail, and as my focus strengthened, it was like being born again. Awakening from a deep, sleep. The pin became hyperreal, and a gateway. I broke free from that dark hold on December 12, 2267.

I woke, my vision now seeing what was truly there around me. I was suspended within a tube

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program the bots to transfer my brain and spinal column to the eco suit and then signal them to smash my living tomb open and retrieve my physical organ.

This was it.

## Chapter 7 by Jacob Z Klimaszewski



In the facility there was no need for light. At least half a mile under the fields of Anglia, the Overmind's hypercentre was a vast, silent tomb, with windows and sunlight dispatched to a distant mythical memory.

But, long ago, there were people here. Without their legacy I would have never gotten this far. I did not recognise their markings, strange icons arranged in lines, colours of blue and white in crosses, yellow boxes with various cartoons of calamity. But my mendrils, reaching out into the Overmind's omnipotent neural network, I found strange optical devices with infrared sensors. Relics of days forgotten, but functioning and connected to the powerline. The physical manifestation of the facility, known as the Flooring Design, was far beyond the level of the network I was prepared to travel, if I alerted the Overmind to my wakefulness I was sure to be liquefied. But through these optical devices I was able to see every hall, every room - and find a storage facility half a mile away with eco-suits capable of human CNS integration.

The bots were unintelligent machines, and followed my commands perfectly. They carefully penetrated my gel-vat, and placed me in a pill-shaped tank full of a diluted water-CSF solution. They then whizzed and trundled along the electrified floor towards the storage centre.

I saw the dark black walls and floors, and heard their whizzing.

Then, a familiar sound. A tinkle, a trinkle, a metallic roll.

A pin had dropped, and as the sound rang through my ears, the whizzing stopped, and I realised something I should have realised long before.

The moment I had been removed from the gel-vat my connection to the network had been

severed. I would have had no way to send anything, not the bots and the pin.

Of course, the pin was not real.

How could I have been so stupid? I had been so stupid that I had not realised my command line would have been severed.

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I am now, probably, hanging a few inches above my gel-vat, suspended in the arms of a bot waiting for instruction.

Oh this familiar paradigm.

I am going to witness a miracle, or I am going to die.

### Chapter 8 by intellikat



Anyone....?

Anyone there?

The Overmind, in some sense that only it could grasp, laughed, and I began my seven thousand, six hundred and twelfth lifetime.

the end

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